

אַשְׁרֵיךְ זִקְנָתִי

'Ashrēch Ziqnātī  
(Blessed Are You, My Old Age)



Studies in Honor of David Bivin's 85<sup>th</sup> Birthday

*edited by Joshua N. Tilton*

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Studies in Honor of David Bivin's 85<sup>th</sup> Birthday

edited by  
Joshua N. Tilton

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**Jerusalem**  
**J PERSPECTIVE**

חסידים ואנשי מעשה היו...אומרין...אשריך זקנתי שתכפרי  
אל ילדוטי, אילו בעלי תשובה.

The ḥasidim and men of deeds would...say...  
“Blessed are you, my old age, for you atone for  
my youth”—these were the practitioners of re-  
pentance.

(t. Suk. 4:2)

## Foreword

Joshua N. Tilton

I first met David Bivin in the summer of 2005 shortly after arriving in Jerusalem as a grad student at the Rothberg International School of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. David had been forewarned of my coming, together with a few other Gordon College alums, by my undergrad Biblical Studies professor, Dr. Marvin Wilson. David sought us out, inviting us into his home for a memorable evening of hospitality and getting to know one another. It was a warm welcome that marked the beginning of an enduring friendship.

Another time David sought me out was in 2006, while I was still a student in Jerusalem, when he invited me to attend the *JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE* conference at which a number of speakers, including several whose contributions appear in this volume, delivered lectures on the intersection of Second Temple Judaism and the Synoptic Gospels. On that occasion David was most particular not only that I should attend, but that I should do so as his guest, free of charge. Once again, David demonstrated his generosity and his determination to include outsiders in his lifelong endeavor to better understand the life and teachings of Jesus.

The third time David sought me out was some years later when he invited me to help him produce *The Life of Yeshua: A Suggested Reconstruction* for *JERUSALEM*

*PERSPECTIVE*. David's invitation came at just the right moment, when I was at a crossroads in life, uncertain which way to turn. It proved to be a lifeline from a completely unexpected direction that allowed me to continue studying the Gospels and to use Greek and Hebrew, even though by then I was living far from Jerusalem and had left my career as a university student far behind.

Since accepting his invitation I have labored with David on all aspects of *JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE* and have continued to benefit from the initial kindness and hospitality he showed me and my fellow students all those years ago. But as a recipient of David's generosity and confidence I am in no



An evening at the Bivins' home in 2005 with Gordon alumni studying at the Rothberg International School of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

way unique. Throughout his life David has extended the hand of friendship to anyone open to his insight that knowledge of the Hebrew language and familiarity with ancient Jewish sources must be combined with the more usual tools of Synoptic studies—facility with Koine Greek and awareness of the evangelists' editorial habits—in order to better understand the words and deeds of Jesus. The contributors to this volume, which honors the many achievements David has made in his first eighty-five years, represent only a few of the multitude of people from all walks of life whom David has encouraged in their pursuit for deeper understanding of the text of the Gospels and the unique individual who stands behind them, Jesus of Nazareth.

Through his open spirit and determined hospitality David has proven himself to be

a man of deeds who, like the ḥasidim of old, is able to bless his advancing age in the knowledge that he has helped to open up a “Jerusalem perspective” on the Gospels, a vantage point from which generations of students and scholars will continue to view Jesus in a clearer light.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Serge Ruzer, “Jesus’ Words, Evangelist’s Contribution and Implicit Biblical Reference: The Case of Matthew 21:43-44”</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Matthean Contributions to the Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants.....	13
Matthew’s Editorial Intent.....	16
A Non-Ethnic <i>Ethnos</i> ?.....	19
Conclusion .....	22
<b>2. Guido Baltes, “(Why) Did Jews Hate Tax Collectors—Or Did They? The Evolution of a Modern Stereotype in Biblical Studies”</b> .....	<b>23</b>
1. Stereotypes, old and new .....	27
2. The surprising silence of the New Testament .....	32
3. The focus of the early church: Salvation of sinners .....	34
4. Luther, Calvin and the emerging <i>topos</i> of “Jewish hatred” .....	37
5. “Back to the sources”: The quest for Greco-Roman and Jewish voices .....	45
6. The path into the present .....	62
7. Conclusion: Stereotypes, ancient and modern.....	67
8. A “ <i>Jerusalem Perspective</i> ” on the Bible: The value of engaging Jewish sources .....	72
<b>3. Marc Turnage, “The Expectation of Sabbatical Redemption within Ancient Judaism and Luke-Acts”</b> .....	<b>75</b>
Daniel 9.....	78
11Q13 .....	95
Luke and Sabbatical Redemption .....	103
The Chronological Markers in Luke .....	104
εἰς ἅφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν .....	109
“ <i>And forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone indebted to us</i> ” .....	123
Conclusion .....	128

<b>4. Lois Tverberg, “He Could No Longer Openly Enter a Town: A Synoptic Study in Light of an Early Luke” .....</b>	<b>129</b>
Entering or Leaving Jericho?.....	134
What if Luke’s Account is First (or Independent)?.....	137
He Could No Longer Openly Enter a Town.....	138
Catching Jesus as He Enters Town.....	141
Miracles as Jesus Approaches a Town .....	143
Jesus’ Commands to “Tell No One”.....	144
Spreading News in Defiance of Jesus.....	145
Conclusion .....	147
<b>5. Joshua N. Tilton, ““Look at...all the trees’: Trees in the New Testament Gospels” .....</b>	<b>151</b>
Tree Anatomy and Nomenclature.....	151
Tree Varieties Mentioned in the Gospels .....	159
Tree Varieties Alluded to in the Gospels.....	174
<b>6. Ze’ev Safrai, “Halakha in the Gospels”.....</b>	<b>183</b>
Outline .....	184
Introduction .....	186
Early Halakha and Current Halakha .....	188
Section 1: The Big Picture.....	190
Initial Results .....	192
Section 2: Literary Contexts .....	193
Incidental Background.....	196
Halakha in Debates.....	205
Section 3: The Literary Structure of the Halakhic Dialogues .....	241
Section 4: The Non-legal Character of the Early Halakha .....	245
Conclusions .....	248
Appendix 1: Halakha in the Gospels and Acts .....	252
Appendix 2: Doubtful Attestations of Halakha in the Gospels .....	264
<i>Tzitzit</i> .....	264
Impurity of the Centurion’s Dwelling .....	267
Jesus’ Criminal Trial .....	269

<b>7. Jeffrey P. García, “From the Galilee to Jerusalem: Luke as a Source for the Routes of Jewish Pilgrimage”</b> .....	<b>271</b>
In the Land of Antipas — The Route Through Perea.....	273
The Way to Emmaus—The Coastal Route.....	286
The Way of the Patriarchs—The Route through Samaria.....	289
Conclusion.....	294
<b>8. R. Steven Notley, “The Sin Against the Spirit: Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10”</b> .....	<b>297</b>
Markan Redaction and Minor Agreements .....	298
Sin Against the Spirit in Light of Ancient Jewish Sources .....	306
Conclusion.....	314
<b>Subject Index</b> .....	<b>317</b>
<b>Index of Greek Words</b> .....	<b>321</b>
<b>Index of Hebrew Words</b> .....	<b>323</b>

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## **Jesus' Words, Evangelist's Contribution and Implicit Biblical Reference: The Case of Matthew 21:43-44**

Serge Ruzer

It is my pleasure to participate in the volume honoring David Bivin, whose decades-long research has contributed greatly to our understanding of the developments underlying the Synoptic tradition. David's analysis is always an example of attentiveness to the text and penchant for exactness of the solutions offered. Below, I will try to follow the former, though as for the latter, my short essay clearly does not meet the bar. However, if in the final account the definite answer eludes us, even the tentative suggestions may have some merit.

### **Matthean Contributions to the Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants**

The parable of the vineyard and the tenants in Matt. 21:33-46, usually seen as referring to Isa. 5:1-7, where the vineyard of the Lord imagery is explained as representing Israel,<sup>[1]</sup> has Synoptic parallels in Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19.<sup>[2]</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See discussion in J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, *The Anchor Bible* (New York et al.: Doubleday, 2000), 206-208.

<sup>2</sup> Dependence on Mark is usually suggested here, see W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; Edinburgh:

## (Why) Did Jews Hate Tax Collectors—Or Did They? The Evolution of a Modern Stereotype in Biblical Studies

Guido Baltes

The image of the despised tax or toll collector,<sup>[1]</sup> ostracized and hated by the Jewish community, is a common motif in Christian bible exposition and New Testament exegesis. The relevant texts for the development of this motif are the stories of the calling of Levi or Matthew (Mark 2:13-17 parr) and Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Additional references to criticism of Jesus' association and table fellowship with "tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19 || Luke 7:34; Luke 15:1-3) or to sins committed by tax collectors (Matt. 5:46;

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek terms *τελώνης* (*telōnēs*), used 21xx in the NT (Synoptic Gospels only), as well as the term *ἀρχιτελώνης* (*architelōnēs*, Luke 19:2 only), etymologically refers to toll collectors (*telos* = border). However, the NT usage of the terms is much more unspecific and can refer to different kinds of customs and tax officials. For the purpose of this article, there is no need to detail the different taxation systems (Roman *publicani* vs. local tax farmers), the complex variety of levies and taxes (*tributum soli*, *tributum capitis*, *stipendium*, *vectigal*, *decuma*, *portorium* etc.) or the variety of offices involved (Lat. *publicanus*, *portitor*, etc., Gk. *telones*, *praktor*, etc.). Sources about the taxation system in the land of Israel are sparse altogether. Most probably, the New Testament *telonai* were not Roman *publicani* (or their subordinates, the *portitori*), but wealthy local Jewish tax farmers, or their subordinate agents. In any case, taxes and tolls in the Galilee were not collected for "the Romans," but for the Jewish ruler Herod Antipas. Zacchaeus, in contrast, might have been part of the *publicani* hierarchy, since Jericho belonged to Roman-governed Judea. For details, see now Aliya El-Mansy, *Τελῶναι im Neuen Testament*, NTOA 129 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2024), with a comprehensive survey of other relevant literature.

## The Expectation of Sabbatical Redemption within Ancient Judaism and Luke-Acts

Marc Turnage

In contrast to the other Synoptic Evangelists, Luke preserved Jesus' unique attachment to Jerusalem and its Temple (Luke 13:34-35; 19:41-44; 21:28; 23:27-31). His second volume, Acts, continued the connection between Jesus' movement to Jerusalem and the Temple, including Paul. In Luke, Jesus predicted the coming destruction of Jerusalem and lamented it (Luke 13:34-35; 19:41-44; 21:20-36; 23:27-31), yet only in Luke does Jesus promise the restoration and redemption of Jerusalem and the Jewish people (Luke 21:20-36; Acts 1:6-8).<sup>[1]</sup> Luke alone of the Gospel writers tied Jesus and his movement to the Jewish national redemptive hopes by retaining the language of redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις [*apolūtrōsis*, “release”] and λύτρωσις [*lūtrōsis*, “redemption”]);<sup>[2]</sup> Luke 1:68; 2:38;

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<sup>1</sup> See M. Turnage, “‘The Things that Make for Peace’: Jesus and the Politics of His Day,” [forthcoming].

<sup>2</sup> The Greek substantives, ἀπολύτρωσις and λύτρωσις, are equivalent to the Hebrew, פְּדוּיָהּ (*gē'ūlāh*, “redemption”). The language of redemption, גָּאָל (*gā'al*, “redeem”) and פְּדוּיָהּ, as well as their Greek equivalents, ἀπολυτρόω (*apolūtroō*, “to release”), λυτρόω (*lūtroō*, “to redeem”), ἀπολύτρωσις, and λύτρωσις, do not appear within works belonging to apocalyptic historiography. This does not mean the idea of redemption does not appear within the apocalyptic worldview. Merely the language of redemption does not belong to the expectations of apocalyptic historiography. Considering this, Luke's presentation of Jesus in his Gospel and his movement in Acts should give pause in identifying either as “apocalyptic.”

## He Could No Longer Openly Enter a Town: A Synoptic Study in Light of an Early Luke

Lois Tverberg

I am greatly honored to be asked to contribute to this volume honoring David Bivin, a beloved mentor and source of wisdom to me for over twenty-five years now. David is a meticulous researcher who has devoted his scholarship to understanding Jesus in light of his original first-century Jewish context. He taught me about the rabbi/disciple relationship, and indeed he showed me what it looks like by pouring his life into the task of discerning his Master's words accurately so that he could live them out.

About twenty years ago I began working with David on editing a selection of his *JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE* articles for a book that my ministry named *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus*.<sup>[1]</sup> I had the delightful task of choosing which of David's articles to include that would have wide appeal to Christians interested in Jesus' Jewish context. I have to admit—I avoided including his research on synoptic relationships, even though David had spent an enormous amount of time on this topic. I knew that it would be too challenging for conservative Christians. I myself

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<sup>1</sup> David N. Bivin, *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus: Insights from His Jewish Context* (Holland, MI: En-Gedi Resource Center, 2005).



## **‘Look at...all the trees’: Trees in the New Testament Gospels**

Joshua N. Tilton

Trees play a modest but nonetheless important role in the Gospels, both in the events of Jesus’ life and as illustrations in Jesus’ teachings. While it is all too easy to look past the individual trees in the Gospels in order to take in the theological “forest,” the author of Luke seems to indicate that each tree has intrinsic worth. That is why, uniquely in Luke, we hear Jesus recommend that his listeners look at *all* the trees (Luke 21:29). In this essay we will attempt to follow this advice literally by taking note of every species of tree mentioned or alluded to in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

### **Tree Anatomy and Nomenclature**

Before we begin identifying the varieties of trees mentioned in the Gospels, however, we will pause to survey the vocabulary associated with trees that occurs in the Gospels.

## Halakha in the Gospels\*

Ze'ev Safrai

I met David Bivin as a child when he was a senior student in the *bet midrash* of my teacher, Prof. David Flusser and my father Shmuel Safrai, may they rest in peace. I grew up into this *bet midrash*, which was conducted in the university, at home, while we traveled, and when we lay down and rose up. David Bivin stood out both as a researcher and in his welcome activity in the *bet midrash* of *JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE*. When I imagine what the study method of [Bet Shammai](#) or [Bet Hillel](#) would have been like, had they been active in modern times, I imagine this *bet midrash* in present-day Jerusalem. The coordinators—the late Prof. Flusser and David Bivin—focused on studying the Jewish background of the New Testament, and the question of [halakha](#) in the New Testament was central to their discussion and their work as public intellectuals. That is why I decided to explore this subject for the book honoring David Bivin.

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\* I am very grateful to my friend, Prof. Peter Thomson, who read the manuscript very carefully and corrected many errors. His judgment was of importance in the writing of the article. I am also grateful to my editor, Joshua N. Tilton, for his great help in editing and improving the article.

## From the Galilee to Jerusalem: Luke as a Source for the Routes of Jewish Pilgrimage<sup>\*</sup>

Jeffrey P. García

Of the four Gospels, Luke uniquely portrays pilgrimage as an integral part of Jesus' life and ministry. This is not surprising, as pilgrimage to Jerusalem was an important part of the Jewish life for communities in the land and the diaspora. Exodus commands that on the feasts of unleavened bread (הַמַּצוֹת [ḥag hamatzōt]; i.e. Passover), weeks (הַשָּׁבֻעוֹת [ḥag hashāvu'ōt], Shavuot/Pentecost), and booths (הַסֻּכּוֹת [ḥag hasukōt], Sukkot) one must not appear before the Lord “empty handed” (רֵיקָם [rēqām], Exod. 23:14-17; 34:23-34). By the first century C.E., being in Jerusalem for the three holy days was not obligatory, but the pilgrimage was observed by many. Josephus, rewriting parts of the Book of Exodus, describes pilgrimage in the following way:

Let those that live as remote as the bounds of the land which the Hebrews shall possess, come to that city where the temple shall be, and this three times in a year, that they may give thanks to God for his former benefits, and may entreat him for those they shall want

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\* For David, whose scholarship and friendship, from afar, has left an indelible mark on my journey.

**The Sin Against the Spirit:  
Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10**

R. Steven Notley

I have chosen this study to honor my dear friend David Bivin, who has championed the work of the Jerusalem School for over fifty years. We are all the beneficiaries of his tireless efforts on our behalf. In this instance, I hope to demonstrate that to grasp the import of this saying, one must engage the three pillars of the Jerusalem School: Hebrew as the spoken language of Jesus; his place within the world of emerging Jewish thought in the Second Temple period; and the imperative to reconsider the literary relationship of the Synoptic Gospels as historical sources.<sup>[1]</sup>

Jesus' statement regarding the sin against the Holy Spirit is embedded within complex layers of developing tradition. While the logion occurs in all three Synoptic Gospels, it appears in different forms and contexts. Both issues of form and context are important to understand what Jesus intended. Most scholars recognize that we possess two independent traditions for Jesus' statement: one

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<sup>1</sup> R. S. Notley, "Preface," in *Jesus' Last Week: Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels—Vol. One*, R. S. Notley, M. Turnage and B. Becker, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 1-13.

## Subject Index

### A

*'am hā'āretz* 170, 201, 219, 233, 238-240  
Aaron 21, 89  
adultery 227, 245  
Aesop 178-179  
Agrippa 33, 69-70  
Aramaic 78, 88, 94, 132, 162, 168, 177,  
190, 205, 235  
Archelaus 104-105, 282

### B

baptism 108, 110, 114-115  
Bar Ma'ayan 71, 238  
Beelzebul 145, 298, 303  
Bet Hillel 214, 274  
Bethpage 161, 283  
bet midrash 183, 194, 203, 205, 225, 237,  
246  
Bet Shammai 189, 214, 227, 274  
Bivin, David N. 5, 13, 72-73, 129, 137,  
149, 180-181, 183, 250, 297

### C

Caesarea 36, 238  
Caiaphas 154  
Calvin, John 38, 41-45, 47, 50, 68, 135  
Cana 193, 196, 201  
Capernaum 140-141, 143, 147, 274-275,  
290-291  
carob 176-178  
Ceaserea 288  
centurion 140-141, 267-268  
courts 51, 269  
cumin 232, 234, 236

### D

David 99, 111, 154  
Day of Atonement 84, 92-93, 103, 168,  
306-309. See also Yom Kippur  
Dead Sea Scrolls 21, 81, 132, 228, 299,  
304

Decapolis 131, 279  
demons 95, 144-145, 214  
dill 232-233  
divorce 186, 188-189, 227, 245

### E

Elizabeth 115  
Emmaus 273, 286-288, 295  
Esau 116, 119, 234  
Essenes 106, 118-119, 210  
*ethnos* 15-22

### F

fig 156-161, 164, 169, 172  
Fourth Philosophy 106  
frankincense 174-176

### G

Galilee 15, 23, 33, 45, 130-131, 144, 163,  
165, 200, 203, 221, 239, 273-275,  
277-279, 288-290, 295  
Garden of Eden 179  
Gehenna 310-313  
Gentile 17, 25-26, 57, 122, 189, 254-255,  
258-259, 261, 268  
Gethsemane 130, 162  
grapes 168, 170

### H

half shekel 226  
handwashing 192, 194, 219-221, 241  
*hasid* 4, 7, 177  
*havūrah* 53-54  
*hāvēr* 53-54, 201, 237-240, 243  
Hebrew 5-6, 19, 47, 75-76, 78, 85, 87-88,  
109, 112, 119-120, 122, 132, 138,  
152, 155, 157-162, 165-166, 168,  
171, 177, 189, 216, 223-224, 226,  
228-229, 247  
Herod Antipas 23, 33, 105, 115-116, 130,  
178, 268, 275, 279

Herod the Great 105, 282, 288, 291  
*hibūr* 264-266  
Holy Spirit 297, 301-302, 304, 307,  
314-315  
honey 166-167

## I

immersion 111, 196, 219, 228-229, 258  
impurity 28, 30, 33, 37, 57, 61, 65-66, 143,  
174, 196, 200-201, 221-222, 234,  
239, 255, 264-266  
Isaac 116-119, 234  
Israel 13, 15-16, 18-22, 23-24, 71, 77, 80,  
83, 89-90, 93, 105-106, 110-114,  
120, 122, 125-126, 128, 136, 152,  
157-162, 164-166, 168-170,  
173-176, 179, 181, 188, 190, 197,  
199, 203, 205, 208-209, 212-213,  
215, 217-219, 222, 224, 226, 229,  
246, 250, 262, 272-273, 276, 278,  
285, 295, 311-312

## J

Jacob 93  
Jericho 23, 134-139, 146-148, 167, 278,  
280-282, 295  
Jesus 5-7, 14-18, 20-21, 23-24, 26, 28-29,  
33-35, 37, 39-40, 43, 64, 72-73,  
75-78, 104-105, 107-110, 115,  
121-124, 128, 129-132, 134-149,  
151-155, 157-162, 165, 167-169,  
171-172, 174-175, 178-180,  
184-191, 193-195, 201, 203-228,  
230-231, 233-240, 242-250, 264,  
267-269, 271, 273-279, 281-283,  
286-288, 290-291, 294-295,  
297-300, 305-307, 309, 314-315  
John the Baptist 29, 32-33, 77, 88,  
108-110, 112, 114-115, 117, 119,  
122, 128, 156, 161, 177-179, 197,  
281  
Joseph 93  
Josephus 16, 33, 69-71, 85, 87, 89, 94,  
103-107, 114-121, 126, 131, 238,

246, 271, 275, 277, 280, 289, 291,  
294

Jubilee 77, 84-89, 91-96, 98-103, 109-110,  
112, 121-122, 126-128

Judas Iscariot 240

Justin Martyr 153, 195

## K

Kingdom of God 14, 16, 76, 123, 142, 171  
kingship 84, 102, 169

## L

leper 26, 138, 140-141, 144, 277  
leprosy 138-140, 144-147  
Levi 23, 36, 40, 51, 237  
locusts 177  
Luther, Martin 37-43, 45, 68

## M

magic 194, 207, 214, 247  
Mary 115, 274  
Melchizedek 88, 95, 98-102, 111, 121  
mikveh 196, 229  
minor agreements 303, 305  
mint 232, 234-235  
Moses 89-90, 126, 138, 140, 170, 205  
mustard 165, 173-174  
myrrh 174-176

## N

nation 14-17, 19-20, 24, 47, 49-51, 60,  
62-63, 70, 106, 120  
Nazareth 6, 28, 122, 131, 187, 245, 274,  
314

## O

oaths 48-49, 117-119, 222, 225, 227, 247

## P

parable 13-14, 17, 22, 32, 54, 124, 136,  
158, 161, 163, 169, 172-173, 176,  
203-204  
Passover 104, 155, 164, 187, 191, 204,  
230, 257-258, 271, 273-274, 283

- Paul 38, 55, 64, 75, 107, 189, 194, 227  
Pharisees 14, 32, 39-41, 43, 76, 106, 172,  
185, 194-195, 205-207, 211-212,  
217, 226, 228, 231-232, 237-238,  
241-242, 244, 247, 250-251  
Philo 69-70, 89, 92, 94, 103, 105-106, 122,  
126, 225, 246, 272  
phylacteries 226, 257  
Pilate 105  
piyyut 197, 250  
plucking 215-217, 241, 245, 259  
polygamy 189-190  
prayer 81, 83, 123-126, 128, 197-198, 214,  
226, 230, 257  
priesthood 20-21, 84, 102  
priests 14, 17-18, 20-22, 84, 90-91, 95,  
100, 127, 135, 138, 140, 154, 196,  
200-201, 219, 226, 242, 255,  
268-269  
prophecy 16, 78-79, 81-82, 84-85,  
101-102, 171, 240  
purification 93, 193-194, 196, 228-229,  
241, 247, 269  
purity 37, 53-54, 56-57, 65-66, 186,  
191-192, 196, 200-201, 219-220,  
228-230, 233, 237-238, 240, 243,  
247, 256, 258, 265
- Q**  
Quirinius 88, 104-105, 107-109  
Qumran 21-22, 83, 85-86, 88-89, 92,  
94-95, 125, 198, 200, 219, 227,  
229, 246
- R**  
repentance 4, 39, 43, 56, 72-73, 81, 108,  
110-112, 114, 120-121, 158, 178
- S**  
Sabbath 177, 199, 206, 235, 241, 243, 245.  
See also Shabbat  
Sadducees 106, 200, 226, 242  
Samaria 105, 144, 273-275, 277-278,  
288-291, 295  
Samaritans 163, 199, 259, 277  
*s<sup>e</sup>michāh* 213  
Septuagint 88, 94, 102, 109-110, 112, 119,  
152, 166, 229  
Shabbat 186, 191, 199, 204, 206-218,  
234-235, 241, 247, 257, 259-260.  
See also Sabbath  
Sicarii 107  
Son of Man 19, 299-300, 304-305  
Sukkot 167, 191, 271, 280, 287  
synagogue 70, 122, 131, 141-142, 198,  
209, 255, 327  
Syriac 193, 228, 232-233, 243, 268
- T**  
tax collectors 14, 23-25, 27-32, 35-44,  
47-49, 52, 56-61, 65-74, 136, 191,  
220, 237-240, 282  
Temple 5, 14, 16, 21, 33, 47, 49, 69-70,  
75-76, 80, 88, 92, 94-95, 103-105,  
110, 123-125, 135, 153-154, 163,  
167, 175-176, 185-186, 194,  
198-200, 215-217, 220, 223-227,  
230, 238-240, 242, 244, 246,  
260-261, 269, 271-274, 281-282,  
288, 290, 295, 297, 299, 313-314  
tenants 13-14, 22, 172  
Torah 20, 54-55, 71, 90, 98, 100, 111, 116,  
131, 195-196, 202, 205-206, 219,  
221, 259-260, 262, 295  
Tree of Life 179-180  
*tzitzit* 191, 264, 266-267
- V**  
vinegar 172, 231  
vineyard 13-14, 90, 161, 172, 217  
vows 48, 222-225, 227, 247
- W**  
War Scroll 115, 125  
wine 171-172, 175, 192, 196, 200, 204,  
230-231, 252

**Y**

Yavneh 225, 246  
Yom Kippur 84-87, 89, 92-96, 100-103,  
109, 121, 127

**Z**

Zacchaeus 23, 32, 36, 43, 51, 136, 139,  
165, 282



## Index of Greek Words

### A

ἅγιος 20  
ἄκανθα 168-170  
ἄκρις 177  
ἀμήν 300  
ἄξινη 156  
ἁμαρτία 103, 123  
ἄμπελος 170-171  
ἄνηθον 232  
ἀπολυτροῦν 75  
ἀπολύτρωσις 75  
ἀρχιτελώνης 23  
ἄφεςις 88-89, 103, 108-112

### B

βασιλεία 14  
βάτος 170  
Βηθφαγή 161  
βλασφημεῖν 304

### Γ

Γεθημανί 162  
Γιναῆς 277

### Δ

δένδρον 152  
δίκαιος 119  
δικαιοσύνη 116, 118-119, 121  
δοκός 152  
δρῦς 178  
δῶρον 223

### E

ἐγγίζειν 136  
ἔθνος 14, 20  
εἰς 304  
ἐλαία 162  
ἐλευθερῖα 89  
εὐσέβεια 116, 118  
εὐσεβήσειν 118

### Η

ἠδύοσμον 232

### Θ

θάλασσα τῆς Γαλιλαίας 131  
θέρος 160

### I

Ἰεριχώ 137, 282  
ἰκανός 267

### K

καθαρίζειν 228-229  
καθαρισμός 193  
καλέω 110  
καρπός 158  
κάρφος 152  
κατά 304  
κέδρος 178  
κεράτιον 176  
κερατωνία 176  
κηρύσσειν 108, 110, 112  
κλάδος 157  
κλήμα 157  
κορβᾶν 223  
κρασπέδον 264

### Λ

λάχανον 232  
λίβανος 175  
λίμνη Γεννησαρέτ 131  
λυτροῦν 75  
λύτρωσις 75

### M

μέλι 166  
μετάνοια 112  
μετρητής 193

### Ξ

ξύλον 152, 154-155, 179

ξύλον ζωῆς 179

## **Ο**

οἶνος 171  
ὄξος 172  
ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν 162  
ὀφείλημα 123-124  
ὄχλος 17-18

## **Π**

παράδεισος 179  
πλεονάκις 272  
πρῶτος 105

## **Ρ**

ράβδος 155  
ρίζα 155

## **Σ**

σίναπι 173  
σμύρνα 174  
σταφυλαί 168  
στιβάς 157  
σῦκα 168  
συκάμινος 164-166  
συκῆ 159  
συκομορέα 164-165  
σῦκον 160

## **Τ**

τελώνης 23, 25, 27-29, 45, 56, 65  
τρίβολος 168-169

## **Υ**

υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου 299, 305

## **Φ**

φοῖνιξ 166  
φύλλον 157

## **Ω**

ὦς κόκκος σινάπεως 173

## Index of Hebrew Words

<p>חג הסוכות 271  חג השבועות 271  חרדל 173  חגב 177  חרוב 176-177  חומץ 172</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>א</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">אלהים 102  אילן 152  אלון 178  אביון 121, 113  ארז 178-179  אלון 178  אטד 168-169</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ט</b></p> <p>טבל 228-229  טומאת אוכלין 221</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>ב</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">ביטול הנדר 224  בית הגן 277  בן אדם 300</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>י</b></p> <p>ישראֵל 21, 154  יין 175, 171-172  ירבוזין 233  יובל 89-88, 109, 112</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>ג</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">גאולה 75  גדף 304  גפן 170-171  גביי 47, 52, 237  גת שמנים 162  גאל 75  גוי 19</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>כ</b></p> <p>קעין החרדל 174  פנית 163  פכותבת 168  פל 21, 266</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>ד</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">דבש 166  דרור 85, 88-89, 93, 101, 103, 109-112, 121,  126  דקל 166</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ל</b></p> <p>לבונה 175-176  לדבר ב 304  להביא צדק עלמים 102  לכלא הפשע 84-83, 102  לכפר עון 84, 103-102  לשענן 168  למשח קדש קדשים 84, 102  לאחוז בידו 274  לקחם חטאות 84, 102  לקחם חזון ונביא 84, 102</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>ה</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">הצדיק 119  השיב 80, 247  המצות חג 271  הר הניתים 162  הושע נא 168</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>מ</b></p> <p>מבשר 101  מלאכה 213, 245  משיתח הרוח 101, 121  מוכס 47, 52  מוצא 287</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>ז</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">זית 162</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>ח</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">חיבור 264</p>

111-113 קרא	174 מור
223 קונם	211 מוקצה
152 קורה	
	<b>ס</b>
<b>ר</b>	109 סליחה
271 ריקם	213 סמיכה
228-229 רחץ	170 סנה
	<b>ע</b>
<b>ש</b>	170, 168 ענבים
שמטה 87-93, 103, 109-110, 112-114, 126-128, 121-122	155 עקר
שנת הדרור 88	277 עין גנים
שקמה 164-165	179, 152 עץ
שבת 233	179 עץ חיים
שבועים שבועים 82	עם 21, 19
שרש 155	עלה 157
	ענף 157
	<b>פ</b>
<b>ת</b>	101 פקודה
תאנה 159-160	171, 158 פרי
תמר 166	274 פידיון הבן
תות 166	245 פיקוח נפש
	233 פיגם
	161 פנה
	179 פנדס
	79-80 פקד
	<b>צ</b>
	119-120 צדקה
	119, 84 צדק
	119 צדיק
	138 צרעת
	245 צורה נפש
	<b>ק</b>
	152 קיפם
	160-161, 101, 87 קז
	160-161 קיץ
	274 קטן
	224 קרבן

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**Cover Image:** A limestone table from the first-century C.E. synagogue in Magdala. Photographed by Joshua N. Tilton.

**Jerusalem**  
PERSPECTIVE